

THE
**FUTURE
OF
AMERICA'S
NATIONAL
PARKS**

First Annual
Centennial Strategy for

Rocky Mountain National Park

August 2007

CENTENNIAL INITIATIVE



Site: ROMO

Year: 2007

Vision Statement

Rocky Mountain National Park, established in 1915, sits 60 miles northwest of Denver, Colorado and straddles the Continental Divide. Its proximity to the rapidly growing Front Range community stretching from Denver to Cheyenne, Wyoming positions the park to serve a variety of needs to a large number of actual and potential visitors. The park currently sees a high number of repeat visitors, a more diverse visitation (Colorado is now 20% Hispanic) than in the past, and changing patterns of use. The park is within a 2 hour drive of 2+ million people.

The park ranges from 7,000 feet in elevation to 14,259 feet at the summit of Longs Peak, the furthest northern fourteener in the lower 48 states. The Continental Divide is crossed by the highest, continuous-paved road in the US - Trail Ridge Road. One-third of the park is above treeline allowing easy access to vast stretches of alpine tundra. Wildlife viewing, hiking and sightseeing are the most common visitor activities.

In 2016 we see a park that remains responsive and relevant to the American people. Our vision as we approach the park's 100th anniversary, and well as the National Park Service's Centennial, is two fold. First, under the national goal of education, we immediately plan to reach out to youth through enhanced educational programming and opportunities with the creation of the Next Generation Fund (NGF). The NGF endowment consists of 10 programs or projects, including the Junior Ranger program, curriculum-based program, and use of technology. Youth are the future stewards of our parks. Secondly, under the national goal of Recreational Experience, we plan in later years to rehabilitate and improve the sustainability of our 350 mile trail system. Improving trail accessibility is also an aim. Trails allow visitors to engage with park resources and create memorable experiences.

Beginning in 1932, the Rocky Mountain Nature Association (RMNA) was created to support the interpretive, educational and scientific needs of the park. In the 1980's they took on the added role of serving as the parks friends group with a focus on supporting the park through philanthropy. Since then they have completed 45 major park projects (including trails) and raised well over \$12 million dollars. Our partnership with RMNA is strong and they stand committed to fully engage in raising funds to support Centennial Initiative projects.

Park/ Superintendent/ Program Manager

Vaughn L. Baker, Superintendent

Site: ROMO

RECREATION

☒ Encourage collaboration among and assist park and recreation systems at every level-federal, regional, state, local-to help build an outdoor recreation network accessible to all Americans.

☒ Rehabilitate over 2,000 miles of trails within or connected to national parks, including trails accessible to those with disabilities.

Rocky Mountain National Park has 350 miles of trails. Studies show that 54% of our three million visitors hike. 30,000 commercial livery trips are made into the park annually. A \$20 million trail maintenance backlog has been identified through the Comprehensive Condition Assessment Process. Well-maintained hiking and accessible trails are a critical recreation resource. Efforts to maintain trails have involved paid staff, volunteers (4,539 hours contributed in 2006), youth groups, conservation corps crews, and many others. Funding has come from a variety of sources including the Rocky Mountain Nature Association. They have funded several trail rehabilitation projects including four accessible trails. Our goal is to create a Trails Forever Endowment so that by 2016 trail maintenance will always have the supplemental funding it needs. Without well maintained trails that visitors find safe and enjoyable, the quality of the experience for over half our visitors can be greatly diminished. Park managers are committed to rehabilitating trails to the highest possible standards. Trails Forever will ensure we reach that goal.

☒ The work described currently is supported by OFS and/ or PMIS

Site: ROMO

EDUCATION

☒ Cooperate with educators to provide curriculum materials, high-quality programs, and park-based and online learning.

☒ Other Park/ Program performance goal(s)

The Next Generation Fund, a \$10 million endowment, consists of multiple projects that will enhance or expand youth education opportunities at Rocky Mountain National Park. The Rocky Mountain Nature Association, the park's non-profit partner, will conduct the fund raising campaign. One project consists of increasing the number of students who visit the park for curriculum-based field studies or have a ranger bring the park to their classroom. In order to meet this goal, an education technician will be hired to supplement the existing one-person education staff. With additional personnel, a year-round program can be offered with winter ecology and snowshoe walks, spring and fall field trips to the park, and youth group education in the summer. Secondly, internships will be offered to two students or recent graduates each spring and fall exposing them to environmental education programming in a national park setting. Finally, a bus transportation grant program will be established to insure that during the era of high fuel costs, that schools will be able to afford to bus students to the park from throughout the Colorado Front Range.

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Site: ROMO

EDUCATION

☒ Introduce young people and their families to national parks by using exciting media and technology.

☒ Other Park/ Program performance goal(s)

The Next Generation Fund, a \$10 million endowment, consists of multiple projects that will enhance or expand youth education opportunities at Rocky Mountain National Park. The Rocky Mountain Nature Association, the park's non-profit partner, will conduct the fund raising campaign. As part of the effort to improve youth education opportunities at the park, an Innovation Fund will be established. Technology and educational methods are changing so rapidly, we can't predict what new device, technique, or opportunity lies ahead that could make a difference in the effectiveness of connecting youth to park stories. While podcasts are currently popular, what might youth be drawn to next? This portion of the Next Generation Fund Endowment is designed to give park managers flexibility in applying the latest technology and thinking to creating learning experiences with the aim of connecting youth to parks forever.

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Site: ROMO

EDUCATION

☒ Promote life-long learning to connect generations through park experiences.

☒ Enroll an additional two million children in the Junior Ranger program.

The Next Generation Fund, a \$10 million endowment, consists of multiple projects that will enhance or expand youth education opportunities at Rocky Mountain National Park. The Rocky Mountain Nature Association, the park's non-profit partner, will conduct the fund raising campaign. This project will create a new version of the popular Junior Ranger Program that has become a main-stay at the park. Annually, we award 5,000 children, primarily between the ages of 6 and 12, a certificate and plastic Junior Ranger badge. By redesigning the program, developing two age-specific activity booklets and promoting the program better, we aim to double the number of children who experience a connection to the park through participating in the program. These programs are aimed at bringing families together and creating a learning opportunity between children and their parents in a national park setting.

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☒ Other Park/ Program performance goal(s)

The Next Generation Fund, a \$10 million endowment, consists of multiple projects that will enhance or expand youth education opportunities at Rocky Mountain National Park. The Rocky Mountain Nature Association, the park's non-profit partner, will conduct the fund raising campaign. Children visiting a national park have the opportunity to learn about the park and its resources many different ways. This effort will be made up of three projects. Funds will be raised to develop exhibits (interior and exterior) aimed at topics of interest and presented in a manner to connect children to important park stories. Next, we plan to produce additional publications (mostly for-sale publications through our non-profit partner) that will create enjoyable experiences for youth. A well-done educational publication can create wonderful memories. Finally, youth and family oriented educational seminars offered by our non-profit educational partner will allow youth to have an exciting, field-oriented, educational park experience. In each case, the goal is to connect children with the park and create life long memories.

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EDUCATION

☒ Impart to every American a sense of their citizen ownership of their national parks.

☒ Other Park/ Program performance goal(s)

The Next Generation Fund, a \$10 million endowment, consists of multiple projects that will enhance or expand youth education opportunities at Rocky Mountain National Park. The Rocky Mountain Nature Association, the park's non-profit partner, will conduct the fund raising campaign. Work opportunities for young people to connect with their national parks are critical to building citizens who become good stewards of our public lands. This will consist of three projects. Student interns will work alongside park rangers conducting interpretive programs for youth and families. Frequently students earn college credit for this work experience. Next, a limited number of fellowships will be offered that allow cross-training between the park and our non-profit partner, or a research opportunity. Fellowships will be awarded competitively. Finally, the American Conservation Corps will be supported. Six-person summer crews consisting of college students will rebuild trails, assist with resource management projects, and engage in educational activities. In each case, students are volunteers, but must be supported with housing, food allowance, uniforms, gear, equipment, and vehicles.

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